

Rethinking Net Promoter Score: Metaemotions and the Path from Brand Loyalty to Advocacy

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Abstract

Consumer research has established that emotions influence judgment, choice, satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth. Most marketing models, however, remain centred on first-order emotions: consumers' immediate responses to marketplace events, such as delight, gratitude, anxiety, guilt, regret, anger, or disappointment. This emphasis leaves a consequential second-order process undertheorised: metaemotions, or emotions about one's own emotions. Consumers do not merely enjoy, fear, regret, or resent a brand encounter; they may feel proud of their enjoyment, reassured by their anxiety, ashamed of their attachment, frustrated by their anger, or relieved that their concern was justified. This conceptual article develops a metaemotional pathway connecting marketplace encounters and first-order emotions with consumer decisions, consumer-brand relationship quality, brand loyalty, advocacy, and Net Promoter Score (NPS). Integrating appraisal theory, emotion-regulation research, customer-experience scholarship, consumer-brand relationship theory, and word-of-mouth research, the framework distinguishes metaemotion assessment from regulation of metaemotions. It proposes that consumers evaluate whether their first-order emotions are appropriate, authentic, controllable, identity-consistent, morally acceptable, and socially shareable; these assessments then shape how emotions are sustained, reinterpreted, suppressed, justified, concealed, or communicated. Seven propositions explain how this process affects decision confidence, post-purchase justification, attachment, recovery after failure, loyal behaviour, and public recommendation. The article positions NPS as an advocacy-oriented downstream indicator rather than a comprehensive loyalty measure. It concludes with a qualitative research programme using critical-incident interviews, digital diaries, netnography, and longitudinal customer-journey designs, and derives implications for customer-experience management and emotionally intelligent NPS programmes.

Keywords: Metaemotions, Consumer Decision-Making, Brand Loyalty, Net Promoter Score (NPS), Brand Relationships

1. Introduction

Emotion plays a central role in consumption. Consumers are drawn to brands that make them feel confident, secure, cared for, entertained, connected, morally responsible, or aspirational, and tend to avoid brands associated with anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, disappointment, powerlessness, or anger. Rather than interfering with rational choice, emotions shape attention, judgment, risk perception, preference, and action (Achar et al., 2016; Lerner et al., 2015). Consequently, consumer research has moved beyond purely cognitive explanations of decision-making to examine affect, discrete emotions, anticipation, attachment, and emotionally meaningful customer experiences.

A limitation nevertheless remains. Marketing scholarship has generally treated emotion as a first-order response: what a consumer feels toward an advertisement, purchase, service employee, interface, community, or brand. This has advanced understanding of joy, gratitude, pride, anxiety, guilt, regret, anger, disappointment, love, and attachment, and has shown that emotions with the same positive or negative tone can involve different appraisals and actions (Kranzbühler et al., 2020; Yih et al., 2020). However, consumers' actions are shaped not only by what they feel, but also by how they interpret, judge, and manage those feelings. This second-order process is captured by metaemotions, or emotions about emotions (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2019; Norman & Furnes, 2016). A customer may feel happy after buying a premium product and then feel proud, guilty, or embarrassed

about that enjoyment. Similarly, anger after a service failure may feel morally justified or excessive. These second-order reactions can alter post-purchase confidence, disclosure, loyalty, complaint, repair, silence, and willingness to recommend.

This article links metaemotions, brand loyalty, and Net Promoter Score (NPS) through a framework in which marketplace encounters evoke first-order emotions that consumers then assess as desirable, appropriate, controllable, authentic, identity-consistent, morally defensible, and socially shareable. These assessments motivate regulation and meaning-making, including savouring, justifying, reframing, suppressing, concealing, repairing, or communicating feelings. In turn, these processes shape decision confidence, post-purchase interpretation, relationship quality, loyalty, and public recommendation.

The framework makes four contributions. First, it introduces metaemotion as a distinct construct in consumer research rather than a relabelling of satisfaction, ambivalence, or regulation. Second, it explains why similar first-order emotions can lead to different decisions. Third, it extends customer-experience theory by showing how brief emotional episodes acquire durable relational meaning. Fourth, it clarifies the loyalty-advocacy distinction: NPS records stated likelihood to recommend, but is not identical to attitudinal or behavioural loyalty. Metaemotion helps explain why one satisfied repeat buyer remains passive while another becomes a vocal promoter.

The article is conceptual and integrative. It synthesises research on emotion and decision-making, metaemotion and regulation, customer experience, consumer-brand relationships, loyalty, advocacy, word of mouth, and NPS. It then develops a staged model, seven propositions, and a qualitative research programme for identifying second-order emotional processes in customer journeys.

2. First-Order Emotions

First-order emotions appear across the customer journey. Before purchase, during purchase, and after purchase. Customer-journey research therefore treats experience as dynamic and distributed over time rather than as a single satisfaction judgment (Becker et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The behavioural meaning of an emotion is not fixed. Guilt after indulgence may lead to avoidance, compensation, reduced consumption, switching, or rationalization through appeals to reward, quality, scarcity, or self-care. Consumers actively cope with psychological threat (Han et al., 2015), and emotion regulation depends on goals and available opportunities (Suri et al., 2018; Tamir, 2016). Thus, first-order emotion creates an initial action tendency without determining final behaviour.

Positive emotion is also ambivalent in its effects. Platform attachment may feel like convenience and belonging, but also like uncomfortable dependence. Brand love can support integration, passion, and loyalty (Batra et al., 2012), yet consumers may still question whether that love is justified. A simple encounter-emotion-behaviour model therefore misses the reflective stage in which consumers interpret what their emotion means and whether it should guide future action.

3. Metaemotion, Emotion Beliefs, and Regulation

3.1 Defining metaemotion

Metaemotion refers to an emotional response directed at another emotion (Norman and Furnes, 2016). Evidence from daily life shows that people can experience both positive and negative emotions about positive as well as negative primary emotions (Bailen et al., 2019). Metaemotion is also different from emotion belief. Emotion beliefs are general or context-specific assumptions about whether emotions are useful, controllable, dangerous, authentic, or appropriate (Ford & Gross, 2019; Kisley et al., 2024). These beliefs provide the standards through which emotions are judged. For example, a consumer who sees anxiety as informative may treat pre-purchase concern as a reason to investigate further, whereas a consumer who sees anxiety as a sign of incapacity may avoid the decision altogether. Metaemotion is the second-order feeling that arises when these beliefs and standards are applied to a current emotion. Recent systematic work on emotion-belief measurement offers useful foundations for future scale development, while also showing substantial variation in how the construct has been defined and measured (Peter et al., 2026).

3.2 Metaemotion assessment versus regulation

A central distinction is between metaemotional assessment and regulation. Assessment asks, “What does this feeling mean, and how do I feel about having it?” Regulation asks, “What should I do with this feeling, or with how I am managing it?” Although connected, they are not identical. Assessment may involve desirability, appropriateness, controllability, authenticity, identity consistency, and moral or social acceptability: whether the emotion is wanted, fits the situation, can be changed, feels genuine, aligns with the consumer’s self-concept, and can be defended or shared.

Regulation follows assessment and may target either the first-order emotion or the way it is being managed. Conventional strategies include situation selection, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 2015; McRae & Gross, 2020). In consumption, these appear as delaying purchase, avoiding advertisements, reading reviews, seeking reassurance, reframing indulgence, concealing enthusiasm, contacting support, expressing gratitude, or posting criticism. Kraft et al. (2026) extend this to meta-emotion-regulation: influencing how one regulates emotion. A consumer may not only reinterpret guilt, but also decide that repeatedly suppressing it is unhelpful and seek a value-consistent resolution.

Acceptance is another important mechanism. Ford et al. (2018) show that accepting negative mental experiences can reduce their harmful effects. In consumer contexts, acceptance may prevent an unpleasant but repairable episode from defining the whole brand relationship. By contrast, believing that negative emotion should not be felt can add distress and push consumers toward avoidance or retaliation.

3.3 Boundaries with adjacent marketing constructs

Conceptual clarity is necessary because a broad definition would make metaemotion indistinguishable from established marketing constructs. Table 1 specifies the boundaries.

Table 1: Construct boundaries in a metaemotion account of consumption

Construct	Object of evaluation	Illustrative statement	Distinction from metaemotion
First-order emotion	Marketplace event or brand	“I am delighted with the service.”	The brand encounter, not the emotion itself, is the object.
Attitude	Brand, product, or behaviour	“I evaluate this brand favourably.”	An evaluative orientation need not be an emotion about an emotion.
Satisfaction	Perceived performance relative to expectations or standards	“The service met my expectations.”	Satisfaction can coexist with guilt, pride, or embarrassment about one's emotional response.
Cognitive dissonance	Inconsistency among beliefs, actions, or self-conceptions	“My purchase conflicts with my sustainability values.”	Dissonance can trigger metaemotion, but is not itself necessarily emotional or second-order.
Ambivalence	Simultaneous positive and negative evaluations of an object	“I love the product but dislike the company.”	Metaemotion concerns feeling about a feeling: “I dislike how much I love it.”
Emotion regulation	Attempt to alter emotion occurrence, intensity, duration, or expression	“I tried to reduce my guilt.”	Regulation is an action or strategy; metaemotional assessment often motivates it.
Brand attachment or love	Emotional bond with a brand	“This brand feels part of me.”	A consumer can feel proud, ashamed, reassured, or uneasy about that bond.

Construct	Object of evaluation	Illustrative statement	Distinction from metaemotion
Metaemotion	Emotion directed toward another emotion	“I feel embarrassed about being so excited.”	The first-order emotion is the focal object of the second-order response.

Post-purchase dissonance, for example, can involve cognitive conflict between “I bought an expensive product” and “I should be financially disciplined.” Metaemotion occurs when the consumer feels guilty about pleasure, ashamed of desire, or relieved after resolving uncertainty. The distinction enables empirical questions that conventional satisfaction or attachment scales do not address.

4. Customer Experience as a Metaemotion Journey

Experience consists of spontaneous, multidimensional responses across the customer journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Touchpoints may be firm-controlled, partner-shaped, customer-created, or social, and their effects depend on wider context and experiential qualities (De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Kranzbühler et al. (2018) further show that customer experience operates across individual, interpersonal, organisational, and environmental levels. Prior work has extended metaemotional consumer decision-making to pet care and human-centred conversational AI, showing how emotionally sensitive service contexts can shape trust, care, and consumer choice (Gupta & Punjani, 2026).

Metaemotion connects these levels. Individually, emotion beliefs, goals, self-control, and past experience shape assessment. Interpersonally, family, peers, staff, and online communities validate or challenge feelings. Organisationally, communication and recovery practices may normalise anxiety, acknowledge anger, or intensify shame. Societally, cultural display rules, sustainability debates, economic conditions, and moral norms shape which consumption emotions appear legitimate. Consider a consumer buying a premium smartphone. Design may create excitement, price may create anxiety, payment may bring relief, delay may cause frustration, unboxing may produce pride, and later concerns about e-waste or instalments may introduce guilt or regret. The final brand relationship is not a simple sum of these emotions. The consumer builds a narrative around the purchase—as deserved investment, impulsive status purchase, productivity tool, or environmentally uncomfortable upgrade—shaped by how they feel about the emotions experienced along the way. Digital environments intensify this reflective process. Reviews, influencers, recommendations, algorithmic prompts, etc., repeatedly invite consumers to reinterpret their reactions. Because digital expression is visible and persistent, online touchpoints become metaemotion spaces where consumers compare, legitimise, revise, and disclose feelings. A goal-oriented view is useful because regulation depends on consumer goals (Becker et al., 2020). Convenience goals may make mild frustration tolerable, while care-oriented goals may interpret the same frustration as relational indifference. Metaemotion therefore explains why the same touchpoint can acquire different meanings across customer journeys.

5. From Metaemotion to Brand Loyalty

Loyalty is multidimensional, involving repeat purchase, attitudinal commitment, resistance to switching, willingness to pay, forgiveness, and relational continuity. Satisfaction is important but does not guarantee loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013), which may also reflect habit, constraints, switching costs, or limited alternatives. Recent meta-analytic research confirms that cognitive, affective, relational, and social factors jointly shape loyalty (Desveaud et al., 2024; Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022; So et al., 2025).

Consumer-brand relationship research gives emotion a central role. Emotional attachment captures bond strength (Thomson et al., 2005), brand love includes integration, passion, and positive connection (Batra et al., 2012), and relationship constructs predict loyalty (Khamitov et al., 2019). Yet reviews note conceptual overlap and call for clearer mechanisms and boundary conditions (Shimul, 2022). Metaemotion offers one mechanism: consumers may feel attached but differ in whether that attachment feels proud, grateful, embarrassing, guilty, uneasy, or manipulative. These second-order emotions shape whether the bond is integrated into identity, defended, concealed, weakened, or rejected. A customer may repeatedly buy a product because it works but avoid

public association if recommendation evokes guilt or reputational risk. Research on co-creation, corporate social responsibility, trust, loyalty, and engagement reinforces the relational and moral dimensions of brand experience (Iglesias et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Metaemotion also clarifies service recovery. Beyond compensation, effective recovery helps customers reconstruct an acceptable emotional story.

Loyalty programmes further illustrate this distinction. Their effectiveness varies by design and context (Belli et al., 2022). Rewards may produce gratitude and recognition, but also irritation at complexity or embarrassment at being “bought.” Metaemotion predicts whether customers welcome rewards or distrust them as engineered dependence.

6. Advocacy, Word of Mouth, and Net Promoters Score

Net Promoter Score (NPS) asks how likely consumers are to recommend a company, product, or service and classifies responses as promoters, passives, or detractors (Reichheld, 2003). Its simplicity has made it popular, but evidence does not support treating it as a complete loyalty measure. Satisfaction and loyalty metrics vary in their links with retention, share of wallet, recommendation, and business performance (Keiningham et al., 2007; Morgan & Rego, 2006), and later studies question claims of NPS superiority or automatic guidance for improvement (Bettencourt & Houston, 2024; Fisher & Kordupleski, 2019; de Haan et al., 2015). In this framework, NPS is best understood as a useful but limited downstream indicator of advocacy. Advocacy is an act of evaluation, identity, and communication. Word-of-mouth research supports this view: eWOM effects vary by platform, product, and metric (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; You et al., 2015); creation motives cannot be inferred from message valence alone (Babić Rosario et al., 2020); channel choice matters because online expression is visible and persistent (Eisingerich et al., 2015); and recommendation language shapes perceived expertise and persuasion (Packard & Berger, 2017). These findings suggest that a metaemotional boundary exists between loyalty and advocacy. Before recommending, consumers may question whether their enthusiasm is trustworthy, socially defensible, identity-consistent, and safe to share. A loyal consumer may therefore remain passive not because the experience was weak, but because the emotional bond does not feel comfortable to make public.

7. Metaemotions Pathway Framework

The proposed pathway contains six linked stages: Marketplace encounter → first-order discrete emotion → metaemotional assessment → metaemotional regulation and meaning-making → decision and relationship outcomes → loyalty and advocacy/NPS.

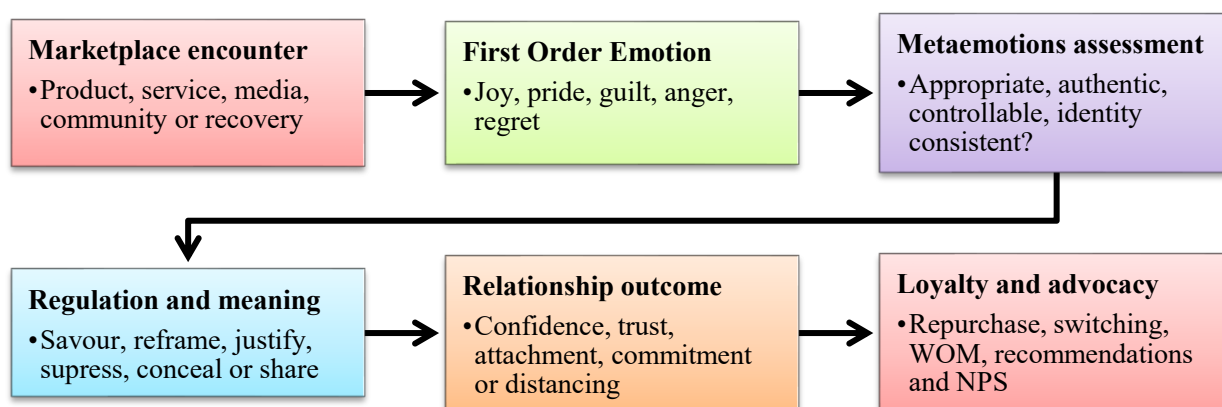


Figure 1: Proposed metaemotions pathway from encounter to advocacy

Marketplace encounters include products, services, employees, settings, advertisements, apps, chatbots, influencers, communities, reviews, loyalty programmes, and recovery episodes. These encounters trigger discrete emotions that consumers assess for desirability, appropriateness, controllability, authenticity, identity consistency, and social or moral acceptability. This assessment shapes regulation and meaning-making, such as savouring, reassurance seeking, reappraisal, justification, suppression, concealment, repair, disclosure, or avoidance. Over

time, these processes influence decision confidence, post-purchase meaning, trust, attachment, commitment, repeat purchase, switching resistance, complaint behaviour, forgiveness, word of mouth, recommendation intention, and NPS responses.

The pathway is recursive rather than strictly linear. Advocacy may strengthen pride when socially validated, while negative feedback may create embarrassment and weaken attachment. Recovery can turn frustration into gratitude, whereas repeated justification of difficult experiences may stabilise or exhaust loyalty. Metaemotions may therefore mediate effects, moderate relationships, or directly shape disclosure and advocacy. The propositions below identify the main relationships for empirical development.

7.1 Metaemotion in consumer choice

First-order emotions influence decisions, but consumers also judge whether those emotions should be trusted. Authentic excitement may encourage approach, while perceived manipulation may reduce confidence. Therefore, metaemotion assessment mediates the relationship between first-order emotions and outcomes such as purchase intention, choice confidence, willingness to pay, and post-purchase evaluation.

7.2 Positive metaemotion and relationship quality

Positive metaemotions—such as pride in attachment, gratitude for reassurance, or relief that concern was recognized—can affirm a brand relationship by making the initial emotion feel legitimate and identity-consistent. Therefore, positive metaemotions strengthen the effect of positive first-order emotions on trust, attachment, identification, and commitment.

7.3 Negative metaemotion after positive experience

Positive experiences can coexist with guilt, shame, embarrassment, or self-criticism, especially when consumption conflicts with financial, health, environmental, cultural, or identity standards. Therefore, negative metaemotions weaken the link between positive first-order emotions and loyalty by increasing emotional dissonance, concealment, identity incongruence, and regret.

7.4 Regulation, recovery, and defection

After failure, negative emotion may lead to repair or rupture. Acceptance, reassurance seeking, and constructive reassessment can preserve the relationship, whereas suppression, rumination, moral escalation, or feeling foolish for trusting the brand can intensify defection. Therefore, metaemotional regulation mediates the effect of negative first-order emotions on recovery, loyalty restoration, defection, and negative word of mouth.

7.5 The loyalty-to-advocacy conversion

Recommendation requires public expression. Loyal customers become promoters when the relationship feels authentic, defensible, socially safe, and useful to others; negative metaemotions can block advocacy without ending repeat purchase. Therefore, positive metaemotions increase loyalty-to-advocacy conversion, whereas negative metaemotions increase passive or detractor responses.

7.6 Visibility, identity, and morality

Metaemotional effects should be strongest when consumption is visible, brands are symbolically meaningful, and recommendation carries moral or reputational responsibility. Therefore, social visibility, identity relevance, moral salience, and perceived recommendation risk strengthen the effects of metaemotional assessment on loyalty and advocacy.

7.7 Digital reflexivity

Digital journeys expose consumers to reviews, comparisons, feedback, persistent records, and public reaction. These affordances can validate emotion but also heighten self-monitoring and reputational concern.

Therefore, digital touchpoints strengthen metaemotional assessment by increasing social comparison, reflection, validation, and opportunities for advocacy or criticism.

Table 2: Summary of proposed mechanisms and outcomes

Mechanism	Illustrative metaemotion	Likely regulation	Possible outcome
Emotional validation	Pride about delight; relief that anxiety was justified	Savour, share, revisit	Confidence, attachment, promotion
Moral conflict	Guilt about pleasure; shame about desire	Justify, compensate, conceal	Conditional loyalty or avoidance
Identity alignment	Pride in attachment; authenticity of enthusiasm	Public affiliation, community participation	Stronger loyalty and advocacy
Identity threat	Embarrassment about fandom or dependence	Suppress, distance, private consumption	Loyal passive or switching
Recovery assessment	Gratitude after acknowledged anger	Reappraise, forgive, communicate repair	Restored trust and positive WOM
Moral escalation	Vindication of anger; anger about being dismissed	Ruminate, complain, mobilise others	Detractor behaviour and negative WOM

8. Conclusion

Consumer research has convincingly shown that emotions affect decisions, relationships, and word of mouth. A first-order account is nevertheless incomplete. Consumers do not simply feel joy, anxiety, guilt, regret, anger, gratitude, or attachment toward brands. They evaluate those feelings. They may welcome, distrust, justify, suppress, disclose, feel proud of, or feel ashamed of them.

The proposed pathway positions this reflective emotional relationship as a bridge from encounter to choice, loyalty, and advocacy. Marketplace events evoke discrete emotions; those emotions undergo metaemotional assessment; assessment motivates regulation and meaning-making; and these processes shape decision confidence, attachment, loyalty, and recommendation. This sequence explains why delight does not necessarily create loyalty, why loyalty does not necessarily create advocacy, and why a repeat buyer may remain an NPS passive.

The central proposition is straightforward but consequential: consumers act not only on what they feel about brands, but also on how they feel about feeling that way. For researchers, this proposition creates a programme spanning emotion theory, customer journeys, consumer-brand relationships, and qualitative inquiry. For managers, it suggests that emotionally intelligent experience design must do more than generate positive affect. It must help consumers interpret, validate, regulate, and communicate emotion in ways that feel authentic, appropriate, identity-consistent, and socially defensible. Brands that achieve this may create not merely satisfied customers, but secure and credible advocates.

9. Proposed Qualitative Research Programme Design – Future Research and Implications

Research can test whether metaemotions explain movement among promoter, passive, and detractor categories, but should also measure actual recommendation, repurchase, switching, and share of wallet. This multi-outcome approach prevents a conceptual contribution from depending on contested claims about a single metric.

In this section we are proposing a qualitative methodology for empirically testing and developing the conceptual framework in future research. Metaemotion is particularly suitable for qualitative inquiry because second-order responses are nuanced, temporally unfolding, and not always captured by established scales. Consumers rarely use the term “metaemotion,” but they spontaneously say, “I felt silly for getting excited,” “I was proud that I chose them,” “I hated how much I liked it,” or “I was relieved that I was not overreacting.” Research must preserve the distinction between an emotion, an evaluation of emotion, and a strategy used to regulate it.

9.1 *In-depth Interviews - Critical-incidents*

Critical-incident interviews should begin with a specific encounter, such as a purchase, service failure, recommendation, unboxing, renewal, return, complaint, or community interaction. The interview can first reconstruct what happened and in what context, before moving to the consumer’s initial emotion, second-order emotional response, assessment criteria, regulation, and outcome.

Useful prompts include:

- “What did you feel first?”
- “How did you feel about having that feeling?”
- “Did the feeling seem appropriate, genuine, controllable, embarrassing, or justified?”
- “What did you do to intensify, reduce, hide, explain, or share it?” and
- “How did this experience affect repurchase or recommendation?”
- “Which feeling became the object of the second feeling?”

This approach, including diagnostic prompts, helps reduce the risk of treating every reflective statement as metaemotion. Researchers should also separate an emotional second-order response, such as “I felt ashamed of my excitement,” from a cognitive evaluation, such as “I thought my excitement was inappropriate,” and from regulation, such as “I avoided looking at further advertisements.” All three are part of the pathway, but they represent different constructs.

9.2 *Digital diaries and consumer journeys*

Digital diaries are ways to capture experiences soon after they occur and show how emotions change over time. Participants can submit short voice notes or written entries after key moments such as search, purchase, delivery, use, support, renewal, and recommendation. For example, a premium purchase may move from excitement to anxiety about spending, then to pride, guilt, reassurance after peer approval, and eventually advocacy. A single retrospective interview might compress this sequence into a broad statement of “overall satisfaction.” Longitudinal interviewing can therefore show how repeated assessment and regulation either stabilize or weaken consumer-brand relationships. Experience sampling can complement diaries by asking brief questions at selected touchpoints about the first-order emotion, the feeling about that emotion, its perceived appropriateness, the action taken, and current likelihood to recommend. When the aim is theory development, qualitative entries should remain the main source of insight, while short scales can provide useful temporal markers.

9.3 *Netnography*

Brand communities, forums, reviews, social media, and anti-brand spaces contain naturally occurring metaemotional language. Netnography can examine how communities legitimate or stigmatize feelings and how collective feedback changes individual assessment. Statements such as “I hate how much I love this,” “I am proud to support them,” “I felt foolish for trusting them,” and “I cannot recommend it even though it works” reveal

relationships among emotion, identity, and advocacy. Researchers should avoid treating every sentiment expression as metaemotion. Contextual interpretation is essential, particularly when sarcasm, platform conventions, and community norms shape language.

9.4 Sampling and analysis

Purposive sampling should include NPS segments: promoters, passives, and detractors; emotionally significant positive and negative incidents; public and private categories; hedonic and utilitarian purchases; and consumers who posted or withheld reviews. Maximum-variation sampling can compare visible identity goods with routine private services, while theoretical sampling can pursue emerging mechanisms such as shame about attachment or pride in ethical consumption.

Analysis can combine deductive and inductive logics. An initial template may include encounter, first-order emotion, assessment criterion, metaemotion, regulation, relational meaning, loyalty, and advocacy. Inductive coding should remain open to unanticipated second-order states and culturally specific emotion rules. Reflexive thematic analysis requires coherence between epistemology, coding practice, and claims rather than mechanical agreement statistics (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For theory elaboration, a Gioia-style data structure can connect informant terms, researcher themes, and aggregate dimensions while retaining transparent links to evidence (Gioia et al., 2013).

Table 3: Illustrative qualitative coding architecture

First-cycle evidence	Second-order interpretation	Regulation	Outcome code
"I was delighted when they remembered me."	Pride or gratitude about feeling recognized	Savoring and sharing	Repurchase; promoter
"I became anxious about the price."	Concern that anxiety signals a poor decision	Reassurance search; delay	Confidence or abandonment
"I enjoyed it but felt guilty."	Moral rejection of pleasure	Justification; compensation; concealment	Conditional loyalty
"I was angry, then wondered if I was overreacting."	Discomfort about anger	Reassessment; private complaint	Repair or passive status
"I was relieved others had the same problem."	Validation of disappointment	Public disclosure; collective complaint	Detractor or recovery demand
"I love the brand but would not admit it publicly."	Embarrassment about attachment	Concealment	Private loyalty without advocacy

10. Practical Implications for Managers

For managers, the framework shifts attention from whether customers feel positively or negatively to how they interpret, regulate, and communicate those feelings. Positive affect may later be seen as impulsive, manipulated, morally uncomfortable, or overly dependent, whereas negative affect can become confidence, relief, or gratitude when reassurance and credible recovery are available. Customer-experience, satisfaction, brand-lift, and NPS programmes should therefore include second-order probes about emotional comfort, authenticity, appropriateness, concealment, and willingness to recommend, while still retaining validated outcome measures. Managers can design experiences that support constructive reassessment: sustainable brands can turn guilt into credible pride through verifiable impact, financial services can normalise uncertainty and ease reassurance, luxury brands can frame pleasure through craftsmanship and meaningful self-reward, health and wellness brands can strengthen agency rather than shame, and AI-enabled services can preserve autonomy so convenience does not become discomfort about dependence. Service recovery should also address the emotional meaning of failure,

validating concern, explaining responsibility, restoring agency, and offering credible repair. Finally, NPS scores should be interpreted carefully: passive customers may be loyal but hesitant to recommend because of social risk, uncertain expertise, identity concerns, guilt, or weak motivation. The managerial goal is therefore not simply to raise scores, but to understand and remove barriers to authentic recommendation.

11. Theoretical Boundaries and Limitations

This is a conceptual paper, and the framework is integrative and requires empirical refinement. Future studies should distinguish metaemotional cognition, emotion beliefs, metaemotion, and regulation through qualitative item generation, expert review, discriminant-validity testing, and comparison with satisfaction, ambivalence, attachment, and dissonance. Causal ordering also needs testing, since metaemotion may follow first-order emotion, but prior beliefs may shape initial assessment and advocacy may feed back into identity and attachment. Cultural and category contexts are likely important, as display rules, moral norms, visibility, involvement, and emotional intimacy may alter whether pleasure, guilt, pride, or anger is accepted or discouraged. NPS should therefore remain an observed recommendation indicator rather than an automatic latent loyalty construct. Finally, multimethod research—combining qualitative inquiry, diaries, experience sampling, experiments, longitudinal customer data, and carefully annotated text analysis—can clarify mechanisms, establish temporal order and causality, and test incremental predictive validity.

12. Ethical Statement and Data Availability

This study did not involve human participants, personal data, or animal subjects. Accordingly, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, ethical sensitivity was central to the study design, given its focus on caregiving decisions, emotional influence, and moral framing. All data analyzed in this study consist of publicly accessible information, articles and sources.

13. Disclosure

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15. Contribution Statement

Authors are involved in the conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of the data; the drafting of the paper; revising it critically for intellectual content; and the final approval of the version to be published; and all authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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